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University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Accreditation report shows much improvement at UM" (1994). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 13324. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases/13324>

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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

University Communications
Missoula, MT 59812
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This release is available electronically on INN (News Net).

July 7, 1994

ACCREDITATION REPORT SHOWS MUCH IMPROVEMENT AT UM

MISSOULA --

The University of Montana has made significant improvements in programs, facilities and services over the past five years, according to a recently completed interim evaluation by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

The positive report, the result of an April visit by an NASC evaluation team, reflects the effort and ability of UM's faculty, staff and administration, President George Dennison said.

"We take accreditation very seriously because we believe the process involved helps us to focus on substantive issues related to quality and access," Dennison said. "That a group of colleagues from peer institutions find our efforts commendable indicates we have found the right course. I particularly want to thank the faculty and staff for the effort during the past five years that produced this result."

"I believe this report reinforces our own notions about the high quality of programs at The University of Montana," Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Robert Kindrick said.

"While we still have an agenda to pursue, this demonstrates that faculty and administrators across the campus have moved decisively to improve programs and the academic environment."

The report's positive comments are particularly gratifying when contrasted with the report from the last regular 10-year accreditation visit in 1989, Kindrick said. That report was quite critical, he said, while this five-year update is "a very serious positive affirmation of the quality of

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our efforts. The difference between the two reports is like night and day."

"The University of Montana continues to be the flagship institution of the state of Montana and is an outstanding institution," evaluators said in the interim report. "Its progress in addressing the issues raised by the 1989 evaluation committee is noteworthy."

The report cites substantial improvements in funding structure, facilities and technology. But perhaps the most gratifying improvements are those in the areas of student services and program accreditation, Kindrick said.

In 1989, several UM programs that require specialized accreditation -- pharmacy, business, education and law schools -- were facing problems with that accreditation. But all of those programs now enjoy fully accredited status, the interim report notes, citing "major efforts ... to address the deficiencies."

The report also notes substantial improvements in student services, including a new student-information data processing system, reorganization of services and "modest increases in staffing."

Other improvements described in the interim report include: revamping of the Montana University System financing structure; dramatic increases in research grants and contracts; efforts to diversify the faculty by attracting qualified women and minority candidates; expanded access to information technology across campus; improvements in library services; and strengthened administration of continuing education programs.

One problem cited in the 1989 report that still needs to be addressed is that some UM graduate degree programs have very low enrollments, Kindrick said. Those programs will be examined, he said, noting that some degree offerings may be eliminated or revamped.

The administration is also working to address other weak points noted in the report, he said, including low faculty salaries and departmental support funds, a low six-year graduation rate and high attrition in graduate programs. Further improvements are also needed in library staffing and campus information technology, he said.

Copies of the interim report are available for public review at the Mansfield Library's reserve book desk.

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Contact: Provost Robert Kindrick, 243-4689. For a copy of the accreditation report, contact the President's Office, 243-2311.

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